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# Past Time Reference in Belizean Creole<sup>1</sup>

Shelome Gooden

## 1 Introduction

The question of the relationship between stativity and past marking in Caribbean English Creoles (CECs) has been subject to much controversy in the literature. This distinction between stative and non-stative verbs is said to be crucial for analyses of past marking in Creole languages. The main issue involves the use of *anterior* (relative past) as well as *zero-marking* to convey past time reference. There has been disagreement over (a) the semantics and function of zero-marking as well as the relative past marker; (b) the way these types of marking interact with other the discourse context and the inherent lexical aspect (*aktionsart*) of the verb. This paper is part of my current work on past time reference in Belizean Creole (BC) in which I examine two main aspects of this debate: first the semantic function of the *relative past* and its relation to the unmarked verb in BC, and second, the discourse function of the relative past marker and the unmarked verb.

In this paper I focus on the discourse function of the relative past and the unmarked verb. Three types of spontaneous speech data will be examined: Genre A, in which the speaker has total control of the context and the topic; Genre B, in which the discourse context and topic is controlled, and Genre C, in which the discourse topic is fixed and the context is preset. I propose that a comparison of this sort not only allows for a more controlled quantitative analysis in which frequencies can be tabulated; but there can also be a precise description of the discourse contexts in which the relative past and the unmarked verb occur.

## 2 Overview

### 2.1 Past Marking and Stativity

Bickerton's (1975, 1984) claims that the *unmarked* verb always expresses *present* with statives and *past* with non-statives and that the *relative past* (*anterior*) marker expresses (*absolute*)<sup>1</sup> *past* with statives and *past-before-*

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of my work in progress on the past time reference in BC. Thanks to Prof. D Winford, the Changelings group at OSU, and the audience members of NWAV 30 for valuable comments.

*past*, with non-statives, have met with recent challenge. Jaganauth (1987), Pollard (1989), and Winford (1993, 2000), for example, argue that unmarked statives often convey past reference in certain discourse contexts. Likewise Gooden (2000 ms) showed that stativity<sup>2</sup> is not the sole deciding factor between an 'absolute past' meaning and a 'past-before-past meaning'. Both stative and non-stative verbs in the BC data examined were used to express past time reference.

## 2.2 Meaning and Uses

In a relative tense system, such as is employed by Creoles, an event/situation may be marked as past with the moment of speech (S) or with some other reference point in the past (c.f. Comrie, 1985). Given that Creoles have a relative tense system, an approach which takes into consideration morpho-syntactic information as well as discourse or contextual information is preferable to one which does not. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the meanings expressed by the past tense category: the *dominant meanings*, which we find represented in its canonical uses, and the *secondary meanings*, which we find represented in the discourse<sup>3</sup> (Dahl, 1985).

## 2.3 Past Marking in BC

According to Winford (2001), BC like other Caribbean English lexified Creoles (CECs) has two categories of *tense*; *RELATIVE PAST*<sup>4</sup> is one and *FUTURE* the other. In examining the relative past tense I will focus attention on past time reference where the situation/event is past in relation to the moment of speech, *absolute past*, and where it is past in relation to another past event, *past-before-past*. I will examine the ways in which these meanings are expressed by the unmarked verb and the relative past marker in discourse.

Relative past is expressed in BC by the auxiliary *mi* and appears preverbally, e.g. *mi gat, mi liv* in example (1) below.

<sup>2</sup> Through application of 'typical' tests for stativity in which stativity was treated as a feature of the lexical aspect (*aktionsart*) of the verb (Dowty ms, 1975, Smith 1995, 1997, Lakoff 1966, Mufwene 1983, 1984), it was shown that that some verbs, example, stance and relationship verbs, are *nonstative*, in a Creole context despite their classification as stative by some researchers (cf. Tagliamonte and Poplack 1993, Tagliamonte, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in English 'future time reference' can be expressed by the PROGRESSIVE TENSE:

<sup>4</sup> I use small caps here to distinguish between the grammatical categories and the semantic notions which are represented in lower case italics.

- (1) *ĩ mi gat plees op ya we mii an hii mi liv*  
*he had a place up here where he and I lived (dwelled)* (DW)

The prototypical use of this category (dominant function) in Winford's view (2000) is to distance some situation from the reference point being focused on in the discourse. As shown in (2), unmarked verbs also occur in BC and can be used to express 'absolute past' temporal reference though they have other functions and express other types of temporal reference as well (cf. Winford 2001).

- (2) *ĩ Øsi di koakanat di hang dung an den ĩ Øwaan wan*  
*She saw the coconut hanging down and then she wanted one.* (DW)

### 3 Data and Methodology

The data described in this paper are spontaneous speech data<sup>5</sup> from two sources, D. Winford's database (DW), based on fieldwork done in Bermudian Landing and from my own (SG) fieldwork in the same community and in Belize City during July 2000. From the DW database there is one speaker, age 58, and from the SG database there are 3 speakers, ages 16, 58 and 62. All informants reported use of BC and English, with English used only in formal settings such as church services. Elicitation sessions were carried out in informal settings, e.g. informants' homes, to facilitate use of BC.

In Genre A (DW), the speaker had complete choice over the topic and context of the discourse. The interviewer/fieldworker merely facilitated the flow of the conversation with minimal responses or questions to prompt the continuation of speech. In Genre B (SG), the context and topic are controlled. I used a set of fifteen pictures depicting a story which took place in the past. The pictures were organized in terms of the sequence of occurrence of events in the story. Informants were told that the story was real and depicted events that took place in the past. They examined the pictures for 5 minutes and were allowed to ask questions for clarification after which they were asked to retell the story while being tape-recorded. Informants were allowed to look at the pictures while telling the story. In Genre C (SG), the speaker had no control over the topic. A subset of the informants had difficulty retelling the picture-based story; these were typically older informants who had little or no formal education. In this case a discourse topic was cho-

<sup>5</sup> The data is transcribed in broad phonemic transcription.



be anterior to the reference point, simultaneous with it, or posterior to it (cf. Chung and Timberlake 1985:203 on event frame).

#### 4.2 The Interpretation of Past/Meaning of Past

When the TL coincides with  $S_i$ , this gives an *absolute past* temporal reference (Comrie 1985:65). The diagram in (4) below is a temporal schema for 'absolute past' interpretation. The line represents time; the situation with an 'absolute past' time reference is therefore located prior to  $S$  where the TL is equal to  $S$ . The example in (5) illustrates.

(4) Schema: |-----Situation/Event-----TL=S--|

-----time----->

- (5) A: Yu memba da kriezi haus dē Yuustu ha da Barrack Road de? *Do you remember that crazy house (asylum) they used to have at Barracks Road there?*
- B: Wich kriezi haus? Dā Barracks? *Which crazy house (asylum)? At Barracks?*
- A: da Barracks *At Barracks*
- B: yes *yes*
- A: Unu Yuustu go rown de an plie an faas wid dē kriezi piipi dē? *Did you (pl) used to go around there and play and interfere with (tease/make fun of) the crazy people?*
- B: No wi doz go rown de, wi mi ha<sub>1</sub> wan fren mi gaan<sub>2</sub> iin de, ī stepfaada mi chap op<sub>2</sub> ī ma rait an di gial gaan kriezi, we doz go de go luk fi shi, siem wi go luk fu meri go rown mi deh striet da Barracks<sub>4</sub> *No, (but) we used to go around there, we had a friend who went in there, her step-father chopped up her mother right and the girl went crazy, we usually go and visit her just like we go searching for (a) merry-go-round...(that) was straight (right) at Barracks.*

*Observations:* The statives (*ha 1* and *deh 4*) and the non-stative (*gaan 2*) refer to *absolute past* situations as in the preceding examples. The implicature is that the situations being referred to by the verbs no longer have cur-





Given these observations, we might reasonably expect to find similar patterns in the BC narratives<sup>9</sup> shown below. Background information gives a backdrop to the main storyline; explanatory material necessary for interpreting the events of the story e.g. time, place, characters (Schiffrin 1981; Wallace 1982, cited in Pollard 1989) (*orientation*) and may also indicate the value of events in the narrative (*evaluation*). Foreground information on the other hand, advances the storyline or indicates the main points of the story (*complicating action*). The narratives are divided in sections along these lines, with the unmarked verbs indicated by Ø and verbs and copulas with *mi* in boldface for ease of reference.

## 5.2 The Data

### 5.2.1 Genre A: Speaker controlled context and topic

In this extract the speaker describes apparent sibling rivalry, which resulted in one child living outside the home with someone else.

(5)	Wen ai Ø kom <sub>1</sub> huom ai Ø si <sub>2</sub> we dah mi di problem <sub>3</sub> wid S. an i tuu breda dem,	<i>When I came home I saw (perceived) what the problem was with S and his two brothers.</i>	Comp. Action
5	dah laik de neva laik a, K and L, an ai Ø si <sub>4</sub> it an' we ai had waz tu du ai had waz tu	<i>It was as if they never liked him, K and L, an I saw it an what I had to do I had to move</i>	Eval. Comp. Action
10	muuv fran mai Ma wid S but wen ai Ø muuv <sub>5</sub> fran mai Ma wid S ai Ø muuv <sub>6</sub> owt ai Ø kom <sub>7</sub> ya.	<i>from my Ma with S but when I moved from my Ma with S I moved out, I came here,</i>	
15	Ai mi liv <sub>8</sub> op iina waa opstiez bifo ai Ø muuv <sub>9</sub> ya an S kudn stie wid mi kaaz i mi tuu smaal ruum <sub>10</sub> , so ai Ø lef <sub>11</sub> S	<i>I lived in an upstairs (building) before I moved here and S couldn't stay with me because there were two small rooms so I left</i>	Em- bed.Ori ent. Eval.
20	dah Mis S.	<i>S at Miss S.</i>	

<sup>9</sup> I use narrative here in a broad sense to cover a range of genres including stories, reports, and plans, among others (cf. Ochs 1997).

*Observations:* In the clause 'ai mi liv op iina wa opstiez bifo ai muuv ya', the non-stative 'liv' which is marked by *mi* expresses 'past-before-past' interpretation. The temporal conjunction, 'bifo' is being used by the speaker to set the events of living in an upstairs building (V8-*liv*) before the event of moving (V9-*muuv*). All the unmarked verbs refer to foreground information, the marked verb (8) and copulas (3 and 10) describe information that can be regarded as background information setting the scene for the speaker's description of the problem. This pattern is also observed in Genre B as is shown below.

### 5.2.2 Genre B: Controlled topic and context

This extract describes the activities of a disobedient child and the consequences of his disobedience.

- (8) Billy mi di plie baal kaa .. Billy was playing ball because...  
 Billy mi de autsaid a hi haus Billy was outside of his house  
 Ødi plie baal an siētaim ī Ødi playing ball and at the same time  
 plie baal i son mi hat ā hi mi... he was playing ball the sun was  
 ā hi mi di tink bowt go da hot and he was... and he was thin  
 biich fi gō swim king about going to the beach to  
 so den Billy Øgaan iinsaid gā swim.  
 aks i ma if hi ku go swim. So then Billy went inside to ask his  
 Wel i ma Øse dat ok...i ku go swim mother if he could go to swim.  
 bot siemtaim hi Ødi tink bowt Well his mother said that ok...he  
 fi go klaim mango chrii tu. So could go to swim but at the same  
 i ma Øtel ā hi ku go swim bot time he was thinking about going  
 hi kyāā go klaim i mango chrii to climb mango trees too. So his  
 kaa i dienjaros an i ku get hert. mother told him he could go to  
 So den Billy Øgaan pan i swim but he could not go to climb  
 ich an Billy Østaat mango trees because it is danger-  
 ous and he could get hurt. So then  
 Billy went on the beach and Billy  
 started  
 tu plie wen hi de pan di biich, to play when he was on the beach,  
 nau hi Ømiit fi hi fren Derrick now he met his friend Derrick and  
 an hi an Derrick Østaat to plie he and Derrick started to play  
 krikrit pan di biich. Afta dat cricket on the beach. After that  
 Billy Øget tyad a plie krikrit so Billy got tired of playing cricket so  
 hi Øtel Derrick 'let's go bai di he told 'let's go to the mango tree  
 mango chrii go pik sō nais to pick some nice mangoes because

mango kaa dē luk raip rait, nau  
ā juusi'.

So den di son mi di gō iin.  
Eniwie hi no di studi dāt. Hi  
Øgaan bai di mango chrīi. I  
Østanop front a it ā i Øtink i  
Ødi rimemba hau i ma Øtel ā i  
ku go swim bot kip awie fram  
di mango chrīi. Hi no di studi  
dat hi di Øtink bowt hau juusi  
di mango an hau nais.... i wā  
ties....so gā ahed an hi Øgaan  
an hi

Østaat tu pik dung mango fi  
hi an i fren Derick. I Østaat tu  
pik dung mango nau. Derrick  
Østaat to iit..An den..hi Ødi  
swing pan di mango chrīi nau i  
Ødi chrai ek iself di shuo Der-  
rick hau hi ku swing pā chrīi.  
So nau afta hi Øswing pan  
chrīi.... i Øgaan an i Øklaim  
di chrīi an iivin mi di kom iin.  
Hi no di studi dat. Hi jus Ødi  
showtop Derrick an Øtel Der-  
rick hau hi deh pan di mango  
chrīi an hi kud du dis ā dat pan  
di mango chrīi. Nau i Øgaan  
an i Ødrap an i  
Øbos...skriepop i nii an i  
Øbus i tuo an den afta dat i  
Ørimemba i ma Øtel ā yu  
kud swim bot kip awie fram di  
mango chrīi bikaa i dienjaros.  
So nau i Øgaan huom an i  
Østaat tu kra i an i Øtel i ma  
we Øhapen. I Øtel i ma hau  
hi mi di klaim di mango chrīi

*they look ripe right now and juicy'.*

*So then the sun was going down.  
Anyway he was not paying atten-  
tion to that. He went to the mango  
tree. He stood up in front of it and  
he thought, he was remembering  
how his mother told him he could  
go to swim but to keep away from  
the mango tree. He was not paying  
attention to that he was thinking  
about how juicy the mango (would  
be) and how nice....it would  
taste....so he went ahead and he  
went and he started to pick man-  
goes for himself and his friend Der-  
rick. He started to pick mangoes  
now. Derrick started to eat and  
then he was swinging on the tree  
and he went and he climbed the  
tree acting up himself showing  
Derrick how he could swing on the  
tree. So now after he swung on the  
tree he went and he climbed the  
tree and evening was coming. He  
was paying no attention to that. He  
was just shouting to Derrick and  
told Derrick how he was on the  
mango tree and he could do this  
and he could do that on the mango  
tree. Now he went and he fell and  
he burst...scraped up his knee and  
he burst his toe and then after that  
he remembered his mother told  
him 'you could swim but keep  
away from the mango tree because  
it is dangerous. So now he went  
home and he started to cry and he  
told his mother what happened. he  
told his mother how he was  
climbing the mango tree and he*

an hi Øskriep hi nii ā Øbos i tuo. So i ma Øhuol i hed an i ma Østaat tu baal an i ma Øtel ā. 'Yu rimemba a Øtel yu no go pā da mango chrii. Rimemba a Øtel yu i dien-jaros'. Hi neva Ølisen so aal hi ku du da kraī nau. So i ma Øtel ā 'wel...yu diserv it sins yu Øgaan pan di mango chrii an a sen yu fi Ø g a a n. swim...yu no going a non a dem.. Yu no, no o swim agen...yu laan yu lesn'.

*scraped his knee and and burst his toe. So his mother held her head and his mother started to bawl and his mother told him. 'Do you remember I told you not to go on that mango tree. Remember I told you it is dangerous'. He never listened so all he could do was cry now. So his mother told him well you deserve it since you went on the mango tree and I sent you to swim..you are not to do any of them. You will not swim again....you have learnt your lesson.*

*Observations:* All of the unmarked verbs in this extract mark foreground information. Following the pattern observed for other CECs, the seven instances where *mi* is used in the text (lines 1-5, 25, 45) all mark background information. However, a different pattern is seen in Genre C.

### 5.2.3 Genre C: Controlled topic

In the extract below, the conversation is between myself and a 58-year-old farmer about the ferry that used to be operated in the village more than 15 years prior to our conversation (lines 16-18).

- (9) SG: So yu eva go dung de pan i feri? Michel se dē ...di feri yuustu go kraas, dung bai Misa Paul.
- RJ: Yes a yuustu werk de tu, werk an di feri tu
- 5 SG: Hau dat werk?
- RJ: Wel.. yu kud tek a luk...a hav wān uol wan rait ya.... Wā gai niē Alan Silasi an hi...wān kooli
- 10 gai an hi jraa..di feri i tel mi se iz laik dis [looking at painting on the wall] yes, iz di onli ting fi rimemba

*So did you ever go down there on the ferry? Michel said they...the ferry used to go across, down by Mr. Paul.*

*RJ: Yes I used to work there too, work on the ferry too.*

*SG: How does that work?*

*RJ: Well... you could take a look...I have an old one right here.... A guy called Alan Silasi and he...a kooli guy and he drew..the ferry and he told me that it is like this [looking at painting on the wall]*

- 15 hi an dis da kupt<sup>7</sup> yiaaz nau. Dis  
about nier fiftiin.. muor dan dat  
bikaaz feri diez don lang taim.  
yes, it is the  
only thing to remember him (by)  
and this is a couple years now.  
This is about, nearly 15...more  
than that because ferry days are  
long gone.
- 20 SG: So wen di piipl kom yaso<sup>2</sup> we  
yu du? [pointing at painting]<sub>1</sub>  
SG: So when the people come  
right here, what do you do?  
[pointing at painting]
- RJ: ..so aal a dē haus ya da weh<sup>2</sup> mi  
de uova riva an den dis mihagny  
stump de a waata said  
RJ: ..so all of these houses right  
here that were across the river  
an then this mahagony stump is  
on river bank,
- 25 weh paa yu Øtel mi yu mī di bied  
an waã lagwud stump de rait dung  
de..iida dis wan ar dis wan<sup>2</sup>  
where you told that you were  
bathing and a logwood stump is  
right down here....either.this one  
or that one
- [pointing at picture] An dis a Ødi  
feri, dis a Ødi tuu tong, den di<sup>2</sup> a  
30 Ødi waiya, di kieblon den...dat<sup>2</sup> da i  
lii haus op da tap pan ā.  
[pointing at picture] And this is  
the ferry, these are the 2 tongs  
then this is a wire being cabled  
up then that is the little roof on  
top of it.
- 35 Den yu a tun ā so..laik tuu baaj yu  
no.  
Then you turn it so.....like 2  
barges you know.
- SG: ok  
SG: ok
- RJ: ..an den yu tun an den..an yu si  
hau di waiya string kraas wei di,<sup>2</sup>  
riva? An a rait so i mi stie bai<sub>1</sub>  
40 kuzn..ongkl Paul de..ahaa..rait bai  
di waata said. Yu going dung yu<sub>1</sub>,  
supuos fi si dis..waa big aayan bai  
kuzn Jean de:  
RJ: ..and then you turn and  
then...and you see how the wire  
is strung across the river? And  
that is exactly how it was beside  
cousin..uncle Paul there, ahaa  
right at the river bank. (If) you  
are going down you are sup-  
posed to see this...a big iron  
beside cousin Jean there.
- 45 SG: Oh!.....mi siit an a wanda a  
wah  
SG: Oh!.....I saw it an I was  
wondering what it was.
- RJ: Aah yes yes! ..ahaa..i kyari di,  
kiebl  
RJ: Aah yes yes! ..ahaa..it car-  
ried (supported) the cable
- 50 SG: So dē put di kyaar dem pān dē<sup>2</sup>  
ar wa  
SG: So they put the cars on there  
or what..?
- RJ: Yes, yes.... but den, di chuck,  
RJ: Yes, yes.... but then the

- di kyaa dem go ya, chuk, di kyaa  
dem go op ya, chuk an aal, chuk  
but nat  
55 bus, no bus chuk, a& kaa aha bi-  
kaaz if a mi feri diez de& big ik-  
wipment di kom uova ya kudn  
kom pan da feri
- SG: Tuu hevvy?  
RJ: Dē tuu hevvy ahaa karek  
60 SG: So piipl go pan de  
RJ: Yes afta wen...i du so an kyari  
ova di chuk an den di piipl dē kum  
owt. Di piipl dēn kum owt  
65 ān waak dung di siē kut we yu go  
weh yu bied..wen yu go dung tu  
waata said ya.
- SG: A rait ya mi bied, rait de  
RJ: Yes, yes! Yes yu si, yu si hau  
70 ting werk owt...dis a di lagwod  
stump we de rait dung de nau..
- no chruu....den dis a Ø wā kau pen  
75 we mi uova de op paa di Chaini dē  
liv rait nau. Wā big  
kau pen fi Misa Russell, di siē gai  
we gat di bus dē, Misa Russell we  
80 niē Tuts...ahaa a fi hi  
pa mi hav wāa paascha uova di  
riva so dis a Ø i kau pen, di bwai  
jraa di kaupen tu...si di
- haus iin di mhm̩m̩..si wā neks lii  
haus we mi de uova de tu. Den dis  
85 a wā kanuu we dē mi gat saida
- truck, the cars go here, truck, the  
cars go up here, trucks and eve-  
rything but not  
buses, no buses trucks and cars  
aha because if it were ferry days  
those big equipment that are  
coming over here (now) could  
not come on that ferry  
SG: Too heavy?  
RJ: They are too heavy, ahaa  
correct  
SG: So people go on there  
RJ: Yes after when...I do this  
and bring over the truck and  
then the people come out. The  
people come out and  
walk down the same path  
where you go to bathe... when  
you go down to the riverside  
here  
SG: It is right here that I bathe,  
right there  
RJ: Yes, yes! Yes you see, you  
see how things work out! ...this  
is a logwood stump that is right  
down there now  
isn't true.....then this is cow pen  
that was over there up where the  
Chinese people live right now. A  
big  
cow pen for Mr. Russell, the  
same guy who has the buses Mr.  
Russell who is called Tuts...ahaa  
it is his  
father who had a pasture across  
the river so this is his cow pen.  
The boy drew the cow pen  
too..see the  
house in the mhm̩m̩..see an-  
other little house that was over  
there too. Then this is a canoe*

dis..... Di bwai we ..... kō rait  
iinya an jraa...rait owt hau di Ber-  
mudian Landing feri mi ..laik

*that they had  
beside this...The boy...came right  
in here an drew...drew what the  
Bermudian Landing ferry was  
like.*

hau i, mi stie. Di yunga jenarieshan  
dē no nuo wat iz a feri.....

*The younger generation they do  
not know what a ferry is. [SG]*

*Observations:* In lines 29-31 all the copulas are zero-marked and the meaning is present as the speaker is looking at a picture of the ferry, which is painted on the wall. If we compare this to clause in lines 74-76, we see that where as the physical descriptions have present tense interpretation, the things being described, e.g. their location, no longer have current relevance, so the speaker distances them from S with the use of *mi* ('absolute past' interpretation). The same is true for the clause in line 81, Mr Russell's father no longer has a cow pen across the river (absolute past) but the picture of it is still on the wall (present):

The speaker also gives background information to orientate the listener as to which Russell is being referred to lines 77-79. Notice however, that it is the foreground information, of the ownership of the cow pen, which is marked by *mi* and the background information, which is unmarked. This seems to go against Pollard's and other researchers claims, however, if we bear in mind that from the speaker's viewpoint it is the foreground information that no longer has current relevance and must necessarily be distanced from S, then we can begin to understand the choice of *mi* in this case. *Mi* is used to indicate remoteness of the situation being described whereas zero indicates the relevance of the situation to speech time. The speaker knows it is no longer the days of the ferry (line 16-18) and in fact offers an evaluation of what would have happened if that were the case lines 55-58.

As shown in (10), another speaker MY (female, 62) talking about the days of the ferry uses the unmarked verb to mark foreground information.

- (10) SG: So yu on di chruk an di  
          chrnk go on di feri?  
MY: ahaa. Bot yu Øhav taim  
      wen di chruk Økom ova  
      wen i drai...an i miebi kud  
      kyari yu to St.Paal, ahm  
      Rancho Delorez, Flowas  
      Bank, but wen i Ø rien i  
      kyaan du it bikaaz wi no Ø

*So you are on the truck and the  
truck goes on the ferry?  
ahaa. But you had times when  
the truck came over when it was  
dry (season)...and maybe it  
could take you to St.Paul's  
(Bank) ahm Rancho Delorez,  
Flowers Bank, but when it  
rained it could not do it because*

hav aal weda ruod laik now	<i>we did not have all weather</i>
yu noh.....	<i>roads like now, you know.....</i>

## 6 Summary and Discussion

As shown, both the relative past marker and the unmarked verb can be used to present foreground and background information in discourse. Whereas this might suggest that there is variation, the more important question is what governs the speakers' choice of past marking. The observations here suggest that the speaker's assessment of the situation (viewpoint) is relevant for the assignment of ground and consequently use of the relative past marker or the unmarked verb. Problematic cases remain, e.g. lines 25-26 'weh paa yu Øtel mi yu *mi di bied*' where you told me you were bathing. This is background information so that the listener can locate the tree stump. Both verbs indicate absolute past time reference yet one is marked, the other is unmarked. Additional examination of spontaneous speech data coupled with more detailed discourse analysis will only enhance our understanding of past-time reference in Creole languages.

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